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Brexit ile Diğer İç ve Dış Faktörlerin Avrupa Birliği - Türkiye İlişkilerine Etkileri

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Özet

500 milyondan fazla insanı temsil eden ve dünyanın en büyük ortak pazarını yöneten Avrupa Birliği, Euro krizi, artan popülizm ve son olarak da Brexit gibi içsel problemlerle baş etmek zorunda kalırken uluslararası terörizm ve mülteci krizi gibi dış kaynaklı problemlerle de karşılaşmıştır. Bu iç ve dış kaynaklı problemler, Avrupa Birliği üyeliğinin yararı konusunda sadece Avrupa Birliği üye devletlerin görüşünü değiştirmemiş aynı zamanda Türkiye gibi aday ülkelerinde bakış açılarını sorgulatmaya başlamıştır. Bazılarına göre, Brexit uzun yıllardır süre gelen Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinin yeniden gözden geçirilmesini gerektiren bir dönüm noktasıdır. Bu makalede, öncelikle AB-Birleşik Krallık ve AB-Türkiye ilişkilerinin geçmişi kısaca anlatılmıştır. Ardından Türkiye ve AB'nin karşılaştığı bazı iç ve dış kaynaklı sorunlar kısaca belirtilmiştir. Türkiye-AB ilişkisinin geleceği çatışma, iş birliği ve yakınlaşma senaryoları çerçevesinde incelenmiş ve her senaryonun muhtemel etkileri tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Brexit
Çatışma
Yakınlaşma
İş Birliği
Türkiye-AB İlişkileri

The Impact of Brexit Together with Other Internal and External Factors on EU – Turkey Relations

Abstract

The European Union, representing more than 500 million people and running the biggest single market in the world, has had to deal with several internal crises such as Euro crisis, rising populism, and most surprisingly Brexit event as well as external problems such as international terrorism and refugee crisis. These internal and external crises have affected not only the member states' views about the beneficial role of the EU membership but also the candidate countries' approach towards the EU such as Turkey. For some, the Brexit event should be seen as a turning point to evaluate the long lasting relationship between Turkey and the EU. The three scenarios "conflict, cooperation and convergence" discussed by Yabancı (2016) are mentioned as the most probable scenarios for the prospective EU-Turkey relationship. In this article, the historical relationships between the EU and the UK and the EU and Turkey are shortly stated. Afterwards, some internal and external problems both the EU and Turkey has been dealing with are briefly mentioned. The three scenarios for future Turkey-EU relationships are discussed and the prospective impacts of each scenario are pointed out.

Keywords

Brexit
Conflict
Convergence
Cooperation
EU-Turkey Relations

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union, which represents a population of more than 500 million people and runs the biggest single market in the world, has currently 28 member countries and six candidate states for membership including Turkey. The history of the enlargement process of the EU started with the accession of the UK, Denmark and Ireland in 1973 and continued up until the accession of Croatia in 2013. Even if the enlargement process has happened a few times throughout the history of the EU, the exit process had never been experienced before 2016. In fact, previous treaties other than the Lisbon Treaty have never offered such an option for any country. The irony is in the fact that the UK is among the first three countries that were accepted as the members of the EU through the first enlargement and the same UK is the first member state that decided and applied for an exit from the EU. Turkey has been trying to be a member of the EU for decades, but after the Brexit event in addition to the other internal and external factors both within the EU and Turkey, there is a new reality for Turkey to evaluate and make use of.

This article aims at finding out a comprehensive answer to the question “How would Brexit together with other internal and external factors affect the EU-Turkey relationship?” by analyzing the historical relationship of the EU with the UK and Turkey as well as their current relationship with each other. The main research method used to find an answer to the question under investigation is secondary data analysis. The background section of the UK and Turkey’s previous relationship with the EU explains the two countries membership processes within the historical context. The next section introduces currently distinguished three scenarios foreseen for the future of the EU-Turkey relationship, namely *convergence*, *cooperation* and *conflict* scenarios that have their own dynamics, advantages and disadvantages as well as the conditions under which these scenarios may come true. In the evaluation of future relations section, the external and internal causes that led to the formation of these scenarios are analyzed in more detail. Within the current chaotic atmosphere both in Turkey and in the EU, the question about the future of the EU-Turkey relationship gains more importance as these historical key partners are dependent on each other, in terms of the issues related basically to economy and security.

The background of the United Kingdom’s and Turkey’s relationship with the European Union

To understand and interpret the present facts and situations correctly and to “make [realistic] predictions for the future, it is necessary to understand and analyze past dynamics of relations” because history is one of the key determinants of the international relations currently established as well as the ones planned to be established in the future (Hauge, 2016). In order to fully comprehend the current EU-UK and EU-Turkey relationships, we should start by stating the background information about the United Kingdom’s and Turkey’s relationship with the European Union as well as their relationship with each other.

To start with, the historical background of the relationship between the EU and the United Kingdom, a European country which became a member of the EEC/EU in 1973 and became the first member that is going to leave the EU as a result of the Brexit referendum in 2016, needs to be examined at first. The history of the relationship between the United

Kingdom and the European Union dates back to September 17th, 1946, when Winston Churchill made his famous speech about the future of the Europe:

“Yet all the while there is a remedy which, [...] is to re-create the European Family, or as much of it as we can, and to provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom. We must build a kind of United States of Europe. [...] We must all turn our backs upon the horrors of the past and look to the future. [...] The first step in the re-creation of the European Family must be a partnership between France and Germany. In this way only can France recover the moral and cultural leadership of Europe. There can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany” (Council of Europe).

As it can be deduced from his speech, Churchill -one of the advocates of the *United Europe*- preferred to keep the United Kingdom, “the European winner of the war,” in the position of just a *friend and sponsor* along with the Soviet Union and America rather than a member of the proposed *United Nations of the Europe*, a disappointing attitude held by “the only surviving big power of all the European nation-states” (Marhold). The United Kingdom’s attitude signifies that the UK regarded herself as one of the super powers of the world as a survivor of the Second World War, the country fighting alone against Nazi Germany, so it didn’t have to take part in the group of the losers (Wilson, 2014). Instead, it should be a supporter of such a union as powerful countries would do, i.e. the USA.

The United Kingdom didn’t join the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) when it was established by France, Germany, Italy, and Benelux countries in 1952 even if it strongly recommended such a unification and reconciliation between Germany and France as a precondition of long-lasting peace in Europe. After a few years of economic integration process, the European Economic Community (EEC) was launched together with the Euratom Community. Marhold states that British governors criticized the ECSC members because of “their exaggerated plans for institutionalizing supranational governance.” The UK claimed that “all these institutional, maybe even constitutional settings [...] would only incur useless expenditures, without doing any good to the economy.” The UK was historically against any political European unity but merely an economic unity, a view that she has promoted since WWII.

As a result of their doubt about the necessity of the institutionalized supranational governance, the UK preferred to establish the EFTA (European Free Trade Area), which “is an intergovernmental organization, founded by the EFTA Convention for the promotion of free trade and economic integration between its Member States [...] [and] not envisage political integration”(EFTA). As Angliviél claims, France was also opposed to giving up its national sovereignty, but they preferred to shape the new European organization, the EEC, in a way that could contribute to its development in a supranational structure led mainly by France and Germany. The EFTA couldn’t compete with the EEC and most of its members including the UK applied for the EEC membership to keep up with the economic development on the continent. Nevertheless, their application for the membership was rejected twice by France. In 1973, after de Gaulle presidency was over and “European balance of power [shifted] clearly and decisively in favor of West Germany,” the UK became a member of the EEC thanks to the widening policy followed by the EEC (Kenealy, 2016). Even if the United Kingdom applied three times for the EEC membership and finally

achieved its goal, the UK has always been an awkward partner for the EU, asking for opt-outs for various policies that the EU has developed for better political and economic integration within the EU such as opt-out from the Euro, from the Schengen passport-free area and many others (Kenealy, 2016).

With regard to the EU-Turkey relationship, we can state that the background of the Turkish relationship with the EEC/EU dates back to Turkey's alliance with the USA driven Western bloc against the USSR driven Eastern bloc. Turkey as one of the founding members of the Council of Europe and a member of the NATO since 1952 has been a key partner of the European countries, especially in terms of the security issues. As many countries such as the UK, Denmark and Ireland noticed the economic success of the EEC and applied for the membership, Turkey was attracted by the success of the EEC. Eralp (2009) points out that "Turkey's application to the emerging EEC in July of 1959 was warmly welcomed by the EEC policy-makers" and it was granted "associate membership in 1963 [...] being one of the two associate memberships in the newly-created Community" after signing the Ankara Agreement. Unlike the following associate membership agreements the EEC signed with other countries, Turkey and Greece were envisaged full membership as the finality of the relationship developed with the EEC (Paul, 2015).

However, the EEC experienced a severe economic crisis during 1970s and had to focus on its own social and economic problems. As well as the economic crisis within the EEC, Turkey intervened in the Sampson coup in Cyprus in 1974, which resulted in the deterioration of the relations with the Western countries, including the USA (Eralp, 2009). Eralp (2009) stresses that the Cyprus problem, which has not been solved yet, coincided with the military intervention in 1980 and that "further increased the divergence in the relationship between Turkey and the EEC." In 1987, Turgut Özal made application for official candidacy to the EEC; however, not until 1999 its candidacy was admitted. During this period, many things changed both within the EEC, which evolved into the European Union, and within Turkey. Various alternatives such as strategic partnership rather than full membership were offered to Turkey but Turkey has insisted on full membership so far. Turkey is now an official candidate for the EU full membership but there are still several obstacles for its membership such as the Cyprus issue, the recently highlighted cultural difference with the European countries, and things like that, which may lead Turkey to look for an alternative model of membership for the EU, or to completely withdraw its application from the EU membership.

Three Scenarios for Future the EU-Turkey Relation

Brexit, "a British exit of the European Union after the June 23rd referendum asking voters: 'Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?'" is an unprecedented event; therefore, nobody knows how the process will be managed, how the EU or the UK will be affected by it, how the non-EU members will react to the event, and many other questions waiting to be answered (Taub, 2016). Many experts and scholars have been discussing these questions in Turkey as well in terms of its possible negative and positive impacts on Turkey-EU relationships. Yabancı (2016) summarizes the most popular prospective EU-Turkey relationship within three theories: "conflict, cooperation and convergence" scenarios.

The first scenario Yabancı (2016) describes is the *conflict* scenario which foreshadows a rise in polarization between the EU and Turkey as a result of the current internal and

external crises both in the EU and in Turkey. "In this scenario, Turkey is perceived as an estranged partner for the EU and vice versa" (Hague, 2016). It is well known that the EU has developed its relationships with the non-EU members under the influence of both internal and external factors so far (Marhold). The Union has been experiencing several internal crises such as the Euro crisis, Brexit as well as external crises such as the migration crisis, terrorism in the last decade, which has caused the Euroscepticism as well as Islamophobia to rise among the EU member states as well as among the non-EU member states. According to Yabancı (2016), this conflict scenario ends negatively for the EU because Turkey would decide to find new partners such as Russia or Iran to protect its national interests. On the other hand, Turkey would lose its biggest and most important economic partner if this scenario is at work.

Not all scenarios envisage a dark future for the EU-Turkey relationship, though. The next scenario is the *cooperation* scenario, which perceives the European Union within the system of differentiated integration (Yabancı, 2016). The identity clashes do not matter for none of the parties in this scenario. They focus on the "strategic interests and common threat perceptions in the neighborhood, as well as the functionality of cooperation rather than mutually shared norms of democracy, human rights and the rule of law" (Yabancı, 2016). Apart from the Brexit propagandas based on the migration problem and economic burden that the Turkish membership would cause for the EU members, the UK has always supported Turkey's membership to the EU; in other words, Brexit ended with the exit of one of the supporters of Turkish membership to the EU. However, most of the other EU member states and the EU institutions would still support maintaining an economic relationship as well as cooperation in security issues with Turkey. The differentiated integration system allows the EU and Turkey to develop a new kind of relationship with each other such as Norwegian model, which necessitates the UK or Turkey to apply for being non-EU members of the European Economic Area (EEA) and develop their relationship with the EU accordingly, or Swiss model, which means that the UK or Turkey has to sign bilateral agreements with the EU for each policy field, or some other models (Dyson & Sepos, 2010). According to Uluç Özüiker, Turkey should wait and see how the EU will evolve before it makes any decision about how to develop its relationship with the EU in the future (www.haberturk.com).

The last scenario put forward by Yabancı (2016) is *convergence* scenario, which means that the EU and Turkey will achieve reconciliation after a while and Turkey would become a member of the EU in the end. However, this scenario still depends on some obligations: Turkey has to improve its progress in its democratization process and meet the Copenhagen criteria. For reconciliation, not only Turkey has to improve its democratic governance and its concomitants such as human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of thought and others, the EU has to make new decisions about its enlargement policy, which has stagnated due to the enlargement fatigue and other internal and external factors. Yabancı (2016) states that third scenario would be realized if the EU and Turkey manages to meet the necessary obligations. This scenario is the most optimistic one but whether it is the most realistic one is not certain.

An Evaluation of Future Relations

According to Marhold the history of the European integration came out as a result of "the combination of [...] internal, intra-European interests and factors, as well as the external, international ones." To be able to anticipate the future of the EU-Turkey

relationship, we have to grasp all the variables that will shape it as well as Brexit. To start with the current internal crises in the EU, we should start with the Eastern enlargement that came out after the dissolution of the USSR, which resulted in various troubles for the EU despite its positive effects. To be able to digest such a big enlargement, the EU had to revise its former structures and previous treaties. In other words, the Eastern enlargement resulted in the so-called “enlargement fatigue or temporary indigestion caused by the 5th enlargement” which caused the EU to abstain from more enlargements including Turkey’s membership (Eralp and Arisan, 2010).

The other internal crisis was 2008 Euro zone crisis, which would possibly end with Grexit (Greek exit from the Euro zone) but did not happen (Alessi and McBride, 2015). They were followed by two external crises: The migration crisis, which got worse in 2015 due to the ongoing civil war in Syria since 2010, and the rising Islamic terrorism on European territories such as in France, Germany and others. Leading a rise in Euroscepticism, these external and internal problems have been used by the rightist and populist conservative national politicians to get support from their citizens as in the case of the UK. The last chain in these series of crises proved to be Brexit that happened in June 2016.

While the EU suffers from such dramatic crises, Turkey has had to deal with its own internal problems as well as the external problems that it shares with the EU. Eralp (2009) points out that there are certain periods of time when the EU-Turkey relationship was really promising such as the years after the Helsinki Summit in 1999 as well as the periods when the relationship was on the brink of breaking point such as the years after Luxemburg Summit in 1997. Yabancı (2016) puts forward that the first years of the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) government witnessed many harmonization laws as well as several amendments in the Turkish constitution in accordance with the EU’s expectations from its candidates. However, this optimistic period was replaced by a period full of conflicts in 2013, especially after the Gezi movement, and it has been worsened since then (ignoring the short positive period during the visa liberalization discussions in 2016). Yabancı (2016) points out that the EU accuses Turkish government with getting more and more authoritarian and violating “the the freedom expression and the rule of law in the post-15 July period” while AKP asserts that the reactions given both to the Gezi movement and to the 15 July coup d’état attempt –two internal breakpoints in recent Turkish history- are just and inevitable to ensure the internal security of Turkey. In addition to these internal crises, Turkey also suffers from the external migration crisis –much more severely than the EU does as it hosts more than 3 million Syrian refugees – and terrorism, which is both an internal and external problem for Turkey.

With regard to Brexit’s contribution to the current chaotic atmosphere, it can be stated that Brexit gave a concrete body to the anti-Turkish approaches within the EU. Brexit is actually interconnected with Turkey’s membership issue in some ways: Brexit proponents used prospective Turkey membership as one of the excuses to leave the EU by promoting that the accession of Turkey -a big country with approximately a population of 80 million, of which a great majority is Muslim- to the EU would deepen the crises in the EU. Even if these were mainly used as a tool by the politicians to achieve their goal (in this case Brexit), it seems that it has created the intended impact on the citizens of the UK so that the Brexit event happened. As a result of this black propaganda, all the Eurosceptics would use it as an effective tool for their own interests in one or another way. Brexit possibly has opened a gate

for the others to follow. If the union decides to get over the Brexit problem by the “ever-closer union” approach, Dalay (2016) says, “the identity and political culture will matter more for any prospective member country [so] the distance between the EU and a Muslim Turkey with a different political culture and troubled democratic credentials will only be widened.”

As Hague (2016) puts forward, the “role of identity [has played a key role] in forming attitudes towards the Turkish accession” so far. It is known that no other country has been subject to such severe opposition and prejudices as Turkey has encountered (Kuneralp, 2017). It is clear that the rise in the populist and rightist parties in the Western world has also contributed to the already present opposition against Turkey. After AKP came to power in 2002, the same rise in the rightist parties has been observed in Turkey as well. It is well known that the rightist parties usually focus on the identity issues and national sovereignty in a way leading to discrimination against the others, in this case against Turkey. As the Europeans promote anti-Muslim attitude more and more towards Turkey, Turkey develops anti-Christian and anti-European attitude in turn. In other words, the EU and Turkey cannot find a middle ground to be able to maintain good relationships recently due to the emphasis made on the identity issues as well as other problems such as democratization, rule of law...etc. and the gap seems to be widening. However, Yabancı (2016) argues that “mutual interests concerning trade, diversification of energy sources, migration and regional security concerns” will obviously encourage the EU and Turkey to cooperate with each other and develop their relationship that has been in a deadlock in the last few years.

CONCLUSION

Brexit, together with other internal crises and external crises experienced both in the EU and in Turkey recently, will define and shape the relationship between Turkey and the EU in the future. The three scenarios –*conflict*, *cooperation* and *convergence*- are defined as the most possible scenarios by the EU experts. It is certain that *conflict* scenario is the worst option for the EU and Turkey because it does not lead to reconciliation between two partners but results in throwing the long-lasting partnership into the bin. However, everybody knows that losing one of its allies since WWII would be disastrous for the EU, especially after losing one of its key member states, the UK. It is also an undeniable fact that Turkey is the shield between the Middle East and the EU so its partnership is invaluable for the EU in terms of security issues. Losing its biggest economic partner, the EU, would be a historical mistake for Turkey as well. Nobody would ensure that any alternative relationship built with Russia or any other country would be more beneficial for Turkey, or at least it would be as beneficial as the EU partnership. The other two scenarios, *cooperation* and *convergence* scenarios, seem more favorable for the EU and Turkey as they promise enhancement in the relationship rather than a severance of relations.

What the EU and Turkey should do is to analyze all the foreseen prospective scenarios in detail and evaluate them professionally. In fact, the current situation of the EU-Turkey relationship would be explained according to a *garden of forking paths*, a story about alternative realities. In this story, you have two or three options at the end of each path, and when you choose one of the options, you eliminate the remaining, possible alternative realities (in this case, relationships) for you, and you can never know what would happen if you had chosen the other options. Turkey and the EU are on a path now and they can choose one of the three options (in this context, scenarios) at the end of the path, and eliminate the

others. Before making up their mind on any of the options, both the EU and Turkey should analyze the costs and the benefits of each scenario and choose the most beneficial one before eliminating the remaining two scenarios. Even if the international relations allows the actors to give up from their former decisions -it is not always possible, though- or it would be too late as the former decisions would already cause so many problems that giving up from these decisions would not solve them easily in a short while. In order not to regret for a harmful, unfavorable decision made by any actors, the EU and Turkey should do their best to develop the most favorable and beneficial relationship with each other in the future.

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